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Narcissism and Short-Term Mating Attempts

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in
Psychology

By

Rebecca E. Burchette

Under the Mentorship of Dr. Nicholas Holtzman

ABSTRACT

Previous research suggests that narcissism and STM are positively correlated. However, most research is based on self-report and does not go into the behavioral aspect of the phenomenon of the link between narcissism and STM, nor does it confirm where the mating selection is taking place (in person or online). The purpose of this research is to measure the behavioral choice of narcissists when presented with an opportunity for short-term or long-term mating in an online simulation. A total of 32 male participants filled out two personality surveys to measure narcissism and they filled out the Big Five. They were randomly assigned to either a short-term mating (STM) or long-term mating (LTM) condition in which they saw ten women and were presented instructions indicating them as interested in “casual” (STM) or “lasting, loving” (LTM) relationships. Participants had the option of emailing as many women as they liked. A two-way interaction was run to determine whether the correlation between narcissism and the number of partners chosen depended on the condition (STM versus LTM). However, there was no significant moderation found. This thesis is part of an ongoing study.

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Narcissism and Short Term Mating Attempts

Narcissism is characterized by arrogance, conceitedness, exploitativeness, and vanity (Raskin & Terry, 1988). In general, narcissists tend to pursue “a sense of superiority” and “respect and admiration from others” (Brummelman, Thomaes, & Sedikides 2016, p. 8). In order to succeed in this, narcissists demonstrate exploitative traits and “a lack of consideration...for others” (Raskin & Terry, 1988 p. 899). It would be logical, then, for narcissists to take advantage of situations they are likely to succeed at and benefit from.

Theories even suggest that narcissism is a method of “frequency-dependent selection” that aids in “balancing selection” in human reproduction which resulted from “the viability of short-term mating” (Holtzman & Donellan, 2015, pp. 482-484). Frequency-dependent selection refers to the event in which certain strategies increase their success due to their uncommon occurrences (Buss, 2009). Short-term mating allows males to “[avoid] commitment” and “identifying which women are sexually accessible,” as well as fertile (Buss & Schmitt 1993, pp. 209-212). This would then lead to them having a higher number of mates over time (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Therefore, it makes evolutionary sense for narcissism to develop in order to guarantee future offspring from multiple sources without having to care for them while ultimately passing on their genes.

As for narcissists themselves, there is a significant amount of data suggesting that they pursue short-term mating. Jonason, in particular, has collected data to demonstrate that narcissists not only pursue STM more than LTM, but are less picky with their partners in STM than in LTM (Jonason & Buss, 2012; Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt,

2009; Jonason, Luevano, & Adams, 2012; Jonason, Valentine, Li, & Harbeson, 2011). Baughman and colleagues (2014) also found that narcissists actually use strategies to facilitate STM.

For this study, we are looking at two different types of mating, short term and long term, with a focus on short term mating. STM is referred to a sexual activity outside of a committed relationship by Vrangalova and Ong (2014). Short term mating has historical benefits for males, according to a study by Buss and Schmitt (1993). It allows males to “[avoid] commitment” and “identifying which women are sexually accessible,” as well as fertile (Buss & Schmitt 1993, pp. 209-212).

Specifically, there is evidence to suggest that narcissism is beneficial to STM facilitation (Dufner et al., 2013). A study by Gildersleeve, Haselton, and Fales (2014) confirmed that narcissism is more attractive for STM to potential mates. In this study, women evaluated different physical traits in the perspective of short-term and long-term mating. Both physical masculinity as well as behavioral dominance over other men was preferred at a significantly higher rate in a short-term context than long-term (Gildersleeve, Haselton, & Fales, 2014). Basic traits and behaviors of narcissists make them more suited for a short-term mating as they are more likely to be found attractive by potential mates in this context (Gildersleeve, Haselton, & Fales, 2014).

Finally, as well as being perceived as more desirable, narcissists also ward off competition for mate selection. Murphy and colleagues’ (2015) study had participants enter a simulation on the computer program Mturk where they were offered the opportunity to compete for a more desirable mate against a competitor perceived as

arrogant. An arrogant competitor ward off other men from a potential mate. This suggests that narcissism makes it easier for to gain mates for STM by warding off potential threats.

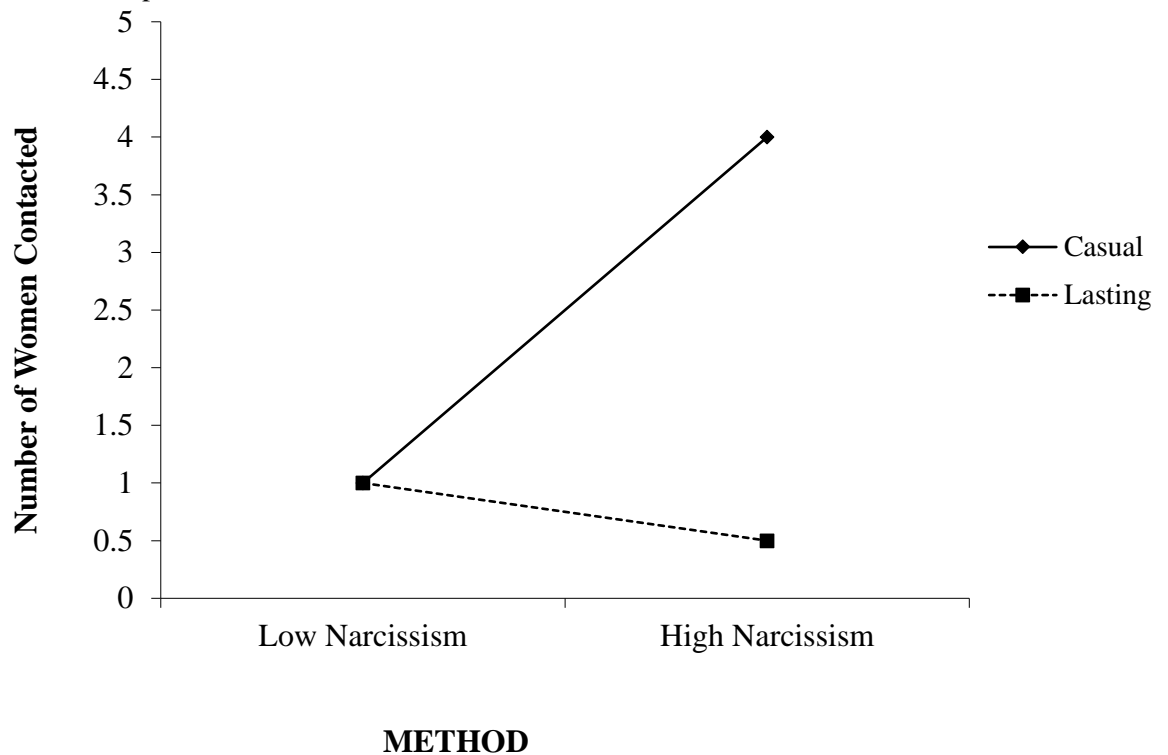
There are a number of benefits that come with STM that motivate narcissists to pursue these relationships. It has been found that narcissists view their number of sexual partners as a social achievement (Schroder-Abe, Rentzsch, Asendorpf, & Penke, 2016), which allows them to gain a sense of admiration from others (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002). This is confirmed by a study that reported narcissists feel a sense of “self-admiration” from a successful sexual encounter (Gewirtz-Meydan, 2017). Overall, multiple sexual encounters serve to confirm a narcissist’s pursuit of power (Lee et al., 2013), as well as prestige and self-advancement (Semenyna & Honey, 2015).

Replications of these basic notions are crucial. Per Nosek (2015), the research emerging from psychology faces a risk of reproducibility. His findings suggest that considerable number of studies with results that seem valid have a low rate of reproduction (Nosek, 2015). This means that in order to ensure that psychological findings are reliable, multiple replications are necessary.

My goal in this study is to replicate that narcissists pursue short term mating at a more frequent rate than non-narcissists. I aim to determine whether (a) narcissists contact more people than those low in narcissism, and (b) narcissists contact more women under the context of STM than LTM. Basically, I hypothesize that narcissism is positively correlated with how many contact attempts are made, and they will attempt communication with women in short-term mating condition significantly more than

women in long-term mating which I expect to be equal to zero. The expected interaction can be seen in figure 1. For short term mating, I anticipate there to be a low amount of contact attempts made by those low in narcissism, but a greater amount for those high in narcissism. For long term mating, I do not expect a significant correlation between narcissism and the number of women contacted.

Figure 1. I expect high narcissism and short-term mating to moderate how many contact attempts are made.



PARTICIPANTS

A total of 32 male Georgia Southern students (21 White, 8 Black, 3 Other) participated in this study. A total of 31 reported to be heterosexual, and 1 reported being bisexual. Out of these participants, 11 were in a relationship, 17 were not, and 4 reported to be “kind of” in a relationship. Most participants were under the age of 25 ($M=20.969$,

$SD=6.293$). All participants were compensated with credit for classes at Georgia Southern University.

PROCEDURE

We randomly assigned participants to either the STM (“You are about to see women interested in casual relationships.”) or LTM (“You are about to see women interested in loving, lasting relationships.”) condition. We measured how mating condition moderated the correlation between narcissism and the number of women emailed.

Participants were told they were entering a study that would allow them to go on a first date with women they chose from a list of photographs with lab-generated emails. All the pictures were pulled from a face data-base (Minear & Park, 2004), and no actual women were involved in the study. Participants were shown a sample of the instructions page and a sample of what the contact information would look like in order to ensure that participants fully understood what to do. The researcher instructed participants that they could send as many emails as they liked. Participants sat in individual cubicles with a computer. Each computer had two internet pages pulled up: a Qualtrics survey and a lab-generated Gmail account. The researcher opened blank emails beforehand and selected the email with a participant number that would be the sender as well as labeled each survey with the same number.

Participants took personality measures (SD3-narcissism and TIPI) to assess levels of narcissism and the Big Five personality traits. They then selected whether they were

attracted to females who were White or females who were Black. An instruction page like the one presented beforehand gave them the same instructions, but also randomly presented a condition (“These women are interested in [casual OR loving, lasting] relationships”). The next page presented pictures of ten women corresponding with the participant’s racial preference and their emails. The participants could then copy and paste the emails addresses into blank messages pulled up in the other tab. The emails were open-ended, allowing the participants respond naturally.

After the participants were finished, each was given the opportunity to record a 10 second video introduction of themselves for future research. Each video ran for exactly ten seconds.

Measures

The Short Dark Triad (SD3) narcissism subscale (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) measured narcissism in participants and is a valid source of measurement (Atari & Chegeni, 2016; Kufner, Dufner, & Back, 2015; Maples, Lamkin, & Miller, 2014). This scale consisted of 9 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach’s alpha was .79 in our sample, indicating satisfactory internal consistency reliability. The Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003) measured the big five personality traits in participants and has been tested as reliable and valid in past studies (Atroszko, Andreassen, Griffiths, & Pallesen, 2016; Ehrhart et al., 2009; Romero, Villar, Gomez-Fraguela, & Lopez-Romero, 2012; Vorkapic, 2016). This scale consisted of 10 items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach’s alphas for agreeableness,

conscientiousness, emotional stability, extraversion, and openness were -.135, .684, .736, .646, and -.028, respectively.

RESULTS

Table 1 contains the means and standard deviations for all variables. For my first hypothesis, I expected that there would be an interaction between narcissism and mating condition, specifically with narcissism positively correlating with number of women contacted solely in the short-term mating condition; I expected there to be no association between narcissism and number of women contacted in the long term mating condition. To test this hypothesis, I used PROCESS to run a two-way interaction (Hayes, 2013). Table 2 contains the results of this analysis. The key interaction was not significant, indicating no support for my hypothesis. This non-significant interaction can be seen in Figure 2.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for all variables

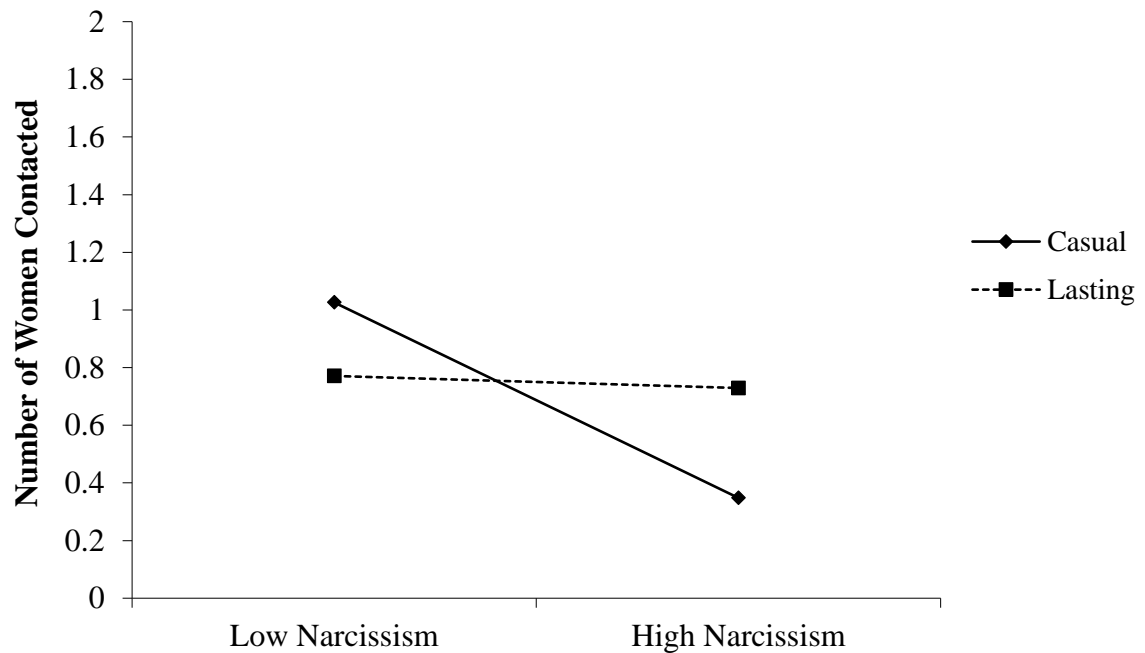
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Big Five		
Agreeableness	4.969	0.832
Conscientiousness	5.453	1.214
Emotional Stability	5.453	1.124
Extraversion	4.078	1.493
Openness	5.438	0.954
Narcissism	3.250	0.604
Number of Women Contacted	0.781	1.289

Table 2. Results of the Regression Analyses.

	B Coeff.	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI LL	95% CI UL
Model 1						
$R^2 = .001$, $MSE = 1.715$						
Intercept	0.688	0.732	0.939	0.355	-0.807	2.182
Mating Condition	0.063	0.463	0.135	0.894	-0.883	1.008
Model 2						
$R^2 = -.028$, $MSE = 1.707$						
Intercept	0.289	1.23	0.225	0.84	-2.331	2.908
Narcissism	0.152	0.38	0.390	0.69	-0.641	0.944
Model 3						
$R^2 = .006$, $MSE = 1.765$						
Intercept	0.194	1.44	0.131	0.87	-2.841	3.228
Mating Condition	0.063	0.40	0.134	0.84	-0.898	1.023
Narcissism	0.152	0.35	0.384	0.74	-0.655	0.959
Model 4						
$R^2 = .0196$, $MSE = 1.802$						
Intercept	2.510	3.96	0.633	0.52	-5.613	10.633
Mating Condition	-1.648	2.72	-0.599	0.54	-7.285	3.990
Narcissism	-0.561	1.17	-0.468	0.63	-3.014	1.892
Mating × Narcissism	0.526	0.84	0.631	0.53	-1.182	2.234

Note: R^2 increase due to the interaction was .014, $F(1, 28) = .398$, $p = .533$.

Figure 2. Non-significant interaction of mating condition and narcissism predicting number of women contacted



DISCUSSION

Contrary to my hypothesis, my small data set suggests that the correlation between narcissism and short-term mating attempts is negligible. I entertain two possibilities for this outcome: (1) narcissists are more likely to be chosen for, rather than actively choosing, short-term mating and (2) my study suffers from low power; this latter possibility leads to the confidence intervals being large, meaning I cannot make strong inferences about my results.

The first possibility is that narcissists are more likely to be chosen for short-term mating, rather than actively selecting it. As suggested in the introduction, there is evidence that narcissists are selected by potential mates for short-term mating. A study

found that women saw narcissistic traits as more desirable for short-term mating versus long-term mating (Gildersleeve, Haselton, & Fales, 2014). Other studies such as Dufner and colleagues' studies gave participants measures on narcissism, self-esteem, physical attraction, and social boldness. A peer of the participant also filled out measures on the participant's mate appeal, friend appeal, and social boldness. It was found that narcissism was positively related to mate appeal, physical attractiveness, and social boldness (Dufner et al., 2013). The positive correlation between narcissism and physical attractiveness as well as narcissism and social boldness shown in Dufner and colleagues' study (2013) make narcissists more desirable for short term mating. A study on speed dating suggested that narcissism is positively correlated with being selected as a potential mate for short-term mating (Jauk et al., 2016). Therefore, it would be likely that narcissists are less likely to pursue short term mating themselves and more likely to be selected by others. This implies that the well-documented correlation between narcissism and short-term mating (Gildersleeve, Haselton, & Fales, 2014; Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009; Baughman et al., 2014) arises from narcissists being selected for short-term sex, rather than narcissists actively pursuing the short-term mating strategy. Future research should explore the possibility that women are choosing narcissists for short-term mating. Prior work by Gangestad and colleagues suggests that this may be the case. In this study, women reported their attraction to men in video tapes in terms of STM or LTM (Gangestad et al., 2007). It was found that men who were perceived as arrogant and/or confrontational were significantly more preferred for STM than LTM (Gangestad et al., 2007). This suggests that in terms of short-term mating, women prefer men with traits that they view as desirable for STM, therefore, implying that women will pursue

such men for reproduction.

The other explanation is problems with the sample size of my study. The final sample size was 32, after excluding participants who responded incorrectly to catch questions (“Please choose *disagree* for this question”). Correlations tend to stabilize when the sample size reaches 250 (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). Thus, my sample is underpowered and is not large enough to make reliable conclusions.

As for future research, I believe that a number of things could be changed. We only used pictures of ten women per condition. Having more pictures would widen the pool to choose from. It might also influence the results if a pilot test had participants rate the pictures on attractiveness. If a majority were low in attractiveness, or even high, it could change how participants responded. To have an even number of low, moderate, and high attractiveness would increase internal validity and control for possible influence of the attractiveness of the pictures.

While it would seem more direct to have physical women in the study, there is an increase in online “hook-up” sites such as grindr and tinder where users see photos and a short bio of other users. While I did not provide a short bio, I did name the type of relationship the women were interested in: “casual” or “loving, lasting.” This essentially gives what a participant would be looking for in a bio online. Apps and sites like these make it easier, and more direct, to pursue short term mating. Therefore, I believe that the basic study design of selecting mates online is supported in college student culture.

Overall, while I believe several changes could be made to the study, the lack of

participants is the largest issue for my results because I cannot pull any implications from my data. It is also possible that narcissists are not actually more likely to select short term mating as much as they are to be selected by potential mates. I strongly believe that as I gain more participants, the results will be better at reflecting past findings in research.

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